

## Congressman Wittman discusses D.C. politics, redistricting, and the Bay

by Brian Whitson, University Relations

(April 25, 2011) The William & Mary community was treated to an insider's look at the politics of the nation's capital on April 19th when Congressman Rob Wittman (R-Va.) met with students and faculty and gave a public lecture as the College's 2011 Hunter Andrews Fellow.

Among the topics Wittman discussed during his hour-long talk in Blow Memorial Hall were the recently averted federal government shutdown, energy policies, redistricting, and the role that the Virginia Institute of Marine Science can play in guiding and evaluating Chesapeake Bay recovery.

The congressman spent his morning meeting with faculty and students, including giving a talk to about 50 students taking an introductory marine science course, part of the recently launched minor in marine science. The course is taught on the main campus by VIMS professors Mark Patterson and Kam Tang.

"To me, the Chesapeake Bay is an economic engine," said Wittman, who serves a member of the Committee on Natural Resources. He said the Chesapeake Bay creates jobs through the seafood industry and tourism opportunities such as fishing and recreation.

"A more productive Bay creates more jobs and more of an economic impact in Virginia," Wittman said, adding as part of the Bay's recovery efforts, it was important to "identify every penny that goes into the Bay and hold everyone accountable."

As a member of the Committee on Natural Resources, Wittman has introduced legislation aimed at increasing the accountability and effectiveness of cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay, and he has been a staunch supporter of the College's Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

"I think we are blessed here in Virginia to have the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. I think they would be perfectly situated to serve in that role as independent evaluator. It is a great opportunity for VIMS, and VIMS is a big piece of William & Mary."

The Hunter B. Andrews Fellowship was created in 1998 by friends of the former state senator and William & Mary alumnus who died in 2005. The fellowship program brings notable journalists, politicians, and scholars to



U.S. Congressman Rob Wittman (2nd from R) joins with VIMS professors Kam Tang (L) and Mark Patterson (R), and VIMS graduate student Theresa Davenport following his talk to their Introductory Marine Science class.

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Virginia Institute of Marine Science  
School of Marine Science  
College of William and Mary  
Gloucester Point, VA 23062  
(804) 684-7000

campus each year. Previous fellows include the recently deceased Washington Post columnist David Broder; U.S. Congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis; and the New York Times' former Supreme Court reporter Linda Greenhouse, who was the 2010 fellow.

Wittman, who represents Virginia's 1st Congressional District, was first elected in December 2007. His reelection in November 2010 continued a long public career spent serving in a variety of government positions at every level, from Montross Town Council to United States Congress.

He holds a Ph.D. in public policy and administration from Virginia Commonwealth University, a Master of Public Health degree in health policy and administration from the University of North Carolina, and a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Virginia Tech.



*U.S. Congressman Rob Wittman addresses W&M undergraduates during their Introduction to Marine Science class.*

During his public lecture at Blow Hall, Wittman said it's been an interesting few weeks in Washington, D.C. Earlier this month, the federal government avoided work stoppage when lawmakers agreed to a last-hour deal on cuts in the budget.

"I think all folks, both sides of the aisle, decided it was better to make sure our government continued to operate," said Wittman, adding that it was important to reach an agreement to make sure members of the military continued to be paid. After weeks of negotiations on budget cuts, the deal cut about \$38 billion in federal spending and avoided the first federal shutdown since 1995.

"The bottom line is we got a deal done," Wittman said. "We made sure the men and women in uniform continued being paid. We are glad that Congress showed it could do the job."

Responding to a question about redistricting, Wittman noted it will be an issue for the Virginia General Assembly to decide but that he favored keeping Williamsburg, James City, and the rest of the Historic Triangle within one congressional district. To reflect new census numbers, the General Assembly must realign the boundaries of all state legislative as well as congressional districts every 10 years. As part of the process, Wittman said, the assembly is given discretion in preserving "communities of compelling interest."

"There is no more compelling community of interest than Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown," Wittman said.